3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
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as a form of investment, if such it can be called. Indeed, over most of Taleland the buying and selling of farm-land is ritually prohibited.[1] Occasionally disputes arise between the heirs when farm-lands pass by inheritance. But these rare quarrels are considered to be despicable and are ascribed to idiosyncrasies of character. In any case they are quarrels over the apportionment of joint property and there is always the chance that the man who has come off worst will later inherit the very land he was deprived of.

It is the exact contrary with wives. They form the chief object of competition both between individuals and between corporate groups. This is explicitly admitted in the conventions ruling the abduction of wives and marriage with another man's ex-wife.[2] The prohibition against abducting the wife (or marrying an ex-wife) of a clansman, kinsman, or member of a locally contiguous clan admits the fact that such acts are the most prolific source of strife, leading, in the old days, to bloodshed at times. The corollary that it is permissible, nay, commendable, to abduct the wife of a member of a distant, unrelated clan is an expression of the idea that geographically distant and genealogically unconnected clans have no direct common interests.

Competition for wives always was and still is the chief source of conflict between individuals and groups in Taleland. More than 90 per cent. of all cases brought to chiefs' courts nowadays are concerned with wives, and they are always triangular affairs with two men competing for the woman or her offspring. The reason for this competitive attitude about wives in a society almost devoid of durable goods of great productive or prestige value and possessing few prestige-conferring offices is not difficult to see, as has been previously indicated. Wives are the sole means of attaining the supreme end of life for the natives, the perpetuation and increase of a man's lineage. Like land, which is a common interest to the whole nuclear and often inner lineage, wives are of common interest to all the members of their husbands' lineages (not only their inner lineages, but even their maximal lineages and clans), for all of whom the perpetuation of their line of descent is of transcendent importance. This idea, which is expressed in the principle of the levirate, lies behind many of the institutions we shall be considering in this chapter.

Tallensi maintain that marriageable young women have become much scarcer than a generation ago. They blame the chiefs and headmen, whose new-found wealth enables them to have large harems, thus robbing young men of possible wives. Tallensi say that girls naturally prefer to marry young men, who are more congenial to them sexually and socially, rather than old men, however prosperous or exalted they may be. But a girl cannot easily resist an offer of marriage from a chief

[1] Cf. *Dynamics of Clanship*, ch. xi.
[2] Ibid., ch. iv.